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ABSTRACT

The strongest recent statement that inequality in America is the natural result of a free market came in "The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life" by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. These authors argued that intelligence determines how well people do in life, and the rich are rich largely because they are intelligent, the poor largely because they are not, and the middle class in middle circumstances mainly because they are of middling intelligence. The "Bell Curve" also attributed the strong connection of inequality to race and ethnicity to the fact that minorities, by nature, are not as intelligent as the dominant society. This book uses the data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth used by Herrnstein and Murray to demonstrate that, contrary to their conclusions, inequality in America is not the inevitable result of free markets operating on natural intelligence, but that it is a social construction molded by social environment and conscious social policy. Americans have created inequality and they maintain it. Specific chapters examine arguments of "The Bell Curve" and show that inequality can be changed, and has, in fact, been changed to some extent already. (Contains 3 tables, 24 figures, and 446 references.) (SLD)

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